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UNCLAS COLOMBO 000732

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR ECA/PE/V
SA/INS (CAMP, DEAN) SA/PD (SCENSNY, ROGERS, HUDSON-DEAN);

E.O. 12958:N/A

TAGS: PREL KPAO PTER EAID CE

SUBJECT: International Visitor Request: Sri Lankan MP's Wish to Look at Disaster Preparedness in the U.S.

¶11. (U) A group of seven Sri Lankan Members of Parliament (MP) have requested a fully-funded trip of a week to ten days' duration to visit Hawaii, California and Washington, D.C., in order to look at how the U.S. prepares for and responds to natural disasters. The group would like to visit the Tsunami warning center in Hawaii, centers for earthquake detection and preparedness in California, and the U.S. Geological Survey and Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance in Washington, D.C. The group is part of a larger Select Committee on Disaster Management formed after the December 2004 tsunami. Part of the committee has already visited similar centers in Europe, another group went to Japan, and the third group, headed by the Speaker of Parliament, would like to visit the U.S.

¶12. (U) The group proposes that the Speaker be accompanied by five other MP's representing different political parties, both in the governing coalition and in the opposition, along with one parliamentary staffer. They must deliver a report on their trip by May 10, so they seek to travel during the first week of May. The Chairman of the Select Committee, Mahinda Samarasinghe, told PAO they had no funds to finance such a trip.

¶13. (U) Post feels the purpose of the trip is worthwhile and would result in useful knowledge about disaster preparedness and prevention being transmitted to the government and the public. Such knowledge, and links with American centers working in this field, could prove vital in the event of another tsunami or large earthquake. This is also a rare example for Sri Lanka of multi-party cooperation, a trend we would like to encourage. Nevertheless, we fully realize the request as stated surpasses the ability of ECA to plan or finance it in such a short time frame. We would like, however, to be able to go back to the Committee and offer a counter-proposal, such as a partially funded trip to Hawaii and California only, for a fewer number of people. Post requests ECA/PE/V and SA/PPD look at feasibility of funding a three-person group to visit only one or two of the requested locations. If SA/PPD tells us what might be possible, we will discuss it with the committee members and determine if they are still interested. Post regrets short time frame, but the head of the committee, who organizes such trips, has been away in Singapore the past two weeks and was unavailable to discuss specifics.

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